



F-35 Joint Program Office

15 April 2019

Hill Airmen Depart for F-35A's First Middle East Deployment

By 419th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

F-35A pilots, maintainers, and support personnel from the Air Force Reserve 419th Fighter Wing and active duty 388th Fighter Wing deployed to Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates last week – the first Middle East deployment for the U.S. Air Force's F-35A Lightning II.

The group is made up of personnel from the active duty 4th Fighter Squadron and Reserve 466th Fighter Squadron, as well as Airmen from their respective aircraft maintenance units and a variety of F-35 support personnel. They will support efforts underway throughout U.S. Air Forces Central Command.

"Having converted from flying the F-16 and being with the F-35 program here at Hill from the very beginning, this deployment is a huge milestone," said Lt. Col. Shad Stromberg, F-35 pilot in the 419th FW. As Stromberg's eighth deployment, he said he hopes to be able to share his experience with some of the younger pilots. "It's really important to be able to lean on someone and learn from those who've been there before."

When Stromberg isn't in uniform, he's a civilian pilot with Delta Air Lines.

"It's exciting to be on this historic first F-35A deployment to the Middle East," said Senior Airman Caleb Shumway, a weapons load crew member in the 419th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. "For us here at Hill, we practice loading munitions for these kinds of missions on a regular basis. The only difference for us this time around is that we're taking these skills overseas."

When he's not serving part time in the Air Force Reserve, Shumway is a construction worker and business marketing student.

The F-35A is the Air Force's conventional takeoff and landing variant of the Department of Defense's Joint Strike Fighter fleet. It provides greater operational capability by combining advanced stealth capabilities with the latest weapons technology.

"We are adding a cutting edge weapons system to our arsenal that significantly enhances the capability of the coalition," said Lt. Gen. Joseph T. Guastella, commander of U.S. Air Forces Central Command.

"The sensor fusion and survivability this aircraft provides to the joint force will enhance security and stability across the theater and deter aggressors."

The F-35A is designed with the entire battlespace in mind, and is intended to fuse, integrate and share data with other battlefield assets. It has one of the most powerful and comprehensive integrated sensor packages. It improves lethality, survivability and adaptability against emerging threats in order to maintain air superiority.



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“The F-35A provides our nation air dominance in any threat,” said Gen. David L. Goldfein, Chief of Staff of the Air Force. “When it comes to having a ‘quarterback’ for the coalition joint force, the inter-operable F-35A is clearly the aircraft for the leadership role,” he stated.

F-35A aircraft and personnel from Hill AFB previously deployed to Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England, in April 2017, as well as the U.S. Pacific region in the fall of 2017.

“As a Total Force effort with a mix of active duty and Reserve Airmen working side by side, this is no different than what we do on a day-to-day basis here at Hill,” said Col. Gina Sabric, 419th FW commander. “We train together and fight together, and as the first deployment for the F-35A to the Middle East, I’m one hundred percent confident we’ll deliver.”

Sabric also thanked the civilian employers of reservists who understand the importance of this mission and allowed them to take leave from their civilian jobs to serve in their military capacity.

The 419th FW and 388th FW are the Air Force’s only combat-capable F-35 units, maintaining the jets in a Total Force partnership that utilizes the strengths of both components. Hill AFB is slated to be home to 78 aircraft by the end of 2019.

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